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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1428
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8586
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 9893
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5304
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 4271
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN LIMA 4650
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3833
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SUBJECT: IS INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT DECREASING IN COLOMBIA?

¶11. (U) Summary. The Government of Colombia and a respected Colombian NGO, the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), are reporting marked decreases (16-30 percent) in the number of new internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the first 9 months of 2006. However, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) argues that, based upon trends they observe in the field, there has been an increase in the rate of internal displacement from a year ago. ICRC attributes the increase to a rise in the rate of individual displacement, which is often underreported. While the debate over the rate of new internal displacement and the number of IDPs overall continues, all sources say new displacements continue to occur primarily due to the actions of illegally armed groups and conflict between these groups and GOC security forces. End Summary

New Internal Displacements: Government, CODHES Show Decline

¶12. (U) The GOC agency responsible for IDPs, Accin Social, records all IDPs that register with the government. From January to September 2006, Accin Social registered 110,302 new displacements. This is a 16 percent drop from the number of IDPs registered during the same period in 2005 (131,716).

In contrast, CODHES estimates that there were 175,216 new IDPs in the first 9 months of 2006. Still, this is a 30 percent drop from the number of IDPs reported by CODHES in the same period in 2005 (252,801), and matches the downward trend reported by the GOC.

¶13. (U) The differences in the GOC and CODHES numbers reflect several key differences in how the GOC and CODHES statistics are determined. While the GOC reports on the number of new IDPs that have been accepted into the national registry (Sistema Unico de Registro or SUR), CODHES estimates new displacements based on information obtained from the Catholic Church, ICRC, the media, civil society, and some field work. This information is then compiled and analyzed.

¶14. (U) In addition to differing methodologies, CODHES' definition of an IDP is more expansive than the one used by the GOC. CODHES includes individuals who have migrated in response to drug eradication efforts, as well as those displaced by natural disasters (CODHES cannot provide a breakdown of the number of IDPs by type of displacement).

The GOC does not include these displacements in their figures. CODHES also counts multiple displacements. For example, if a family is displaced more than once, each displacement is considered new and included in the count. The GOC registry only counts a displaced individual at the time they register. An individual can only register one time with the SUR, even if they have experienced repeated displacements.

¶15. (U) These differences in GOC and CODHES statistics are not new and are also reflected in their accounting of the overall number of IDPs in the country. Since 1995, the GOC identified 1,874,917 Colombians as internally displaced, while CODHES estimates the overall number of displaced to be 3,175,544.

¶16. (U) The data that the GOC has reported for January through September 2006 are expected to change several times in the coming months. As part of its effort to improve the registration system, a response to January 2004 and August 2006 rulings by Colombia's Constitutional Court, the GOC has increased outreach efforts and is changing the methodology by which they compile, analyze and report displacement data. The GOC says these efforts will likely lead to substantial revisions in previously reported data.

ICRC: Or is it Increasing?

¶17. (SBU) The ICRC disagrees with the GOC and CODHES statistics indicating an overall decline in newly displaced. Based on figures it has collected from field operations, the number of IDPs ICRC assisted in 2006 increased by about 20 percent, primarily due to a significant rise in individual displacements. In the first nine months of 2006, ICRC assisted 50,415 persons (34,100 from individual displacements and 16,315 from mass displacements). During the same period in 2005, ICRC assisted 40,672 persons (24,649 from individual displacements and 16,023 from mass displacements).

¶18. (SBU) The sharp rise in the number of individual displacements which, according to ICRC, are less visible and more difficult to detect than mass displacements, is a fact that neither the GOC nor CODHES may have accounted for. While victims of mass displacement events are often readily identified and assisted by the GOC and aid groups, individuals frequently face greater obstacles to accessing assistance and may be unwilling (due to fear) or unable (lack of knowledge) to register with the GOC.

Locations of Displacement

¶19. (SBU) According to all the sources, much of the new displacement is due to actions by the FARC, ELN and newly emerging groups in the departments of Nario, Antioquia, Meta, Caquet, Norte de Santander and Putamayo. While it is generally agreed that paramilitary violence by the AUC has declined significantly due to the demobilization process, new emerging criminal groups continue to use forced displacement to gain control over strategic or economically valuable territory. As fighting between the Colombian Army and illegally armed groups has intensified in certain areas (e.g. Nario, Antioquia, Norte de Santander and Choc), civilians have come under increasing threat. In such situations, many IDPs remained trapped in conflict zones, unable to flee the situation and access assistance. Many other new IDPs have moved to areas around large cities such as Bogot, Cartagena, Cali and Medellin. In many big-city IDP slums, FARC/ELN sympathizers and/or ex-paramilitaries actively discourage IDPs from registering with the government through force, intimidation, and disinformation.

Refugee Outflows Also Continue

¶10. (U) It is important to note that these displacement figures do not include refugees who may have chosen to cross

national borders into neighboring countries in pursuit of permanent or temporary international protection. (CODHES estimates that from January to September 2006, at least 7,372 Colombians may have crossed into Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama).

Comment

¶11. (U) Data from all sources - GOC, CODHES, and ICRC - shows that internal displacement is continuing at an average rate of more than 12,000 individuals per month. With this number of forced displacements and their impact on communities throughout the country, there is a need to ensure that humanitarian attention, protection and reintegration assistance to IDPs remains a priority.

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